



Providing Quality Service to Customers of the Courts

A Self-Study Training Module



Court Support Personnel Training © 2004 Michigan Judicial Institute



Introduction

This self-study module was produced by the Michigan Judicial Institute (MJl) specifically for Michigan trial court support personnel. This publication was funded by the Michigan Commission on Law Enforcement Standards (MCOLES) in 2000 and updated in 2004 by MJl. These materials may not be reproduced without prior written permission from MJl.

Upon completion of this self-study, you will be able to:

1. Distinguish between internal and external customers of the court.
2. Identify reasons why providing customer service is important to the Michigan judicial system.
3. Assess your own style of communication and how your natural style affects how you relate to others.
4. Utilize the tools provided in this self-study to improve your interactions with customers and co-workers.

For inquiries on this or other training resources available through the Michigan Judicial Institute, contact us at 517-373-7171.



A Customer Service Dilemma...

Employees throughout many industries share a common situation: They often handle the same kind of customer interaction over and over again during the day. This can often make employees bored or frustrated. They feel like they hear the same things 100 times a day.



The danger is that employees may begin to make assumptions about what the customer wants or needs and may not hear the subtle, important differences. This is especially important to the courts since each person is entitled to justice in individual cases. Walt Disney World in Florida has a unique way to handle this problem.....



A Customer Service Story....

Employees at Walt Disney World in Florida are put through a comprehensive customer service training program. The employees see themselves as being “on stage”. Their job is to make their guests happy while they are in Disney World.

Even though jobs rotate from day to day, it is one person’s task to stand inside Cinderella’s Castle to answer questions. One employee counted the number of times she answered, “Where’s the restroom?” and it came to 85 times in a day. By the end of the day she wanted to say, “Can’t you see the sign, dummy!”. But she remembered her training where she learned that it may be the millionth time YOU’VE heard the question, but it is the FIRST time the customer has asked it.

So treat each customer who visits your court as if he or she is the first customer of the day, and as if you’ve never heard their situation before. It is a unique request for that customer and each customer deserves the best treatment you can give. ¹

¹Cycle of Service, Achieve Global Inc, 1998.



Who Are My Customers???

Pro Per Litigants

Attorneys

Police Officers

Judges

General Public

Defendants

Magistrates

Prosecutors

Other Clerks



Customers of the Court

- **Employees of the courts work together to ensure that the general public has access to justice in a timely manner. Any one employee of the court must depend upon co-workers to complete his/her responsibilities.**
- **Think about it:**
 - **If a judge issues an order and no one enters it into the computer system, will it be executed?**
 - **If a clerk fails to schedule a court date on the computer, will the hearing occur?**
- **Every person in the court is like a link in a very long chain. If one person fails to do his/her job, the chain is broken and someone is denied justice.**
- **When your co-workers depend on you to complete their responsibilities, then your co-workers are your customers. They are your INTERNAL customers.**
- **People who are not employed by the court but who depend on you are your EXTERNAL customers.**



Internal or External Customers???

- List all customers who are employed by the court and require service from me.

These are my INTERNAL customers

- List all customers who are NOT employed by the court, however still require service from me.

These are my EXTERNAL customers



Who Are My Customers???

Internal Customers

My Supervisor

Court Administrator

Other Clerks

Co-Workers

Judges

Magistrates

Referees

Probation Agents

External Customers

Attorneys

Prosecutor's Office

Police Officers

Defendants

Pro Per Litigants

General Public

Media Outlets

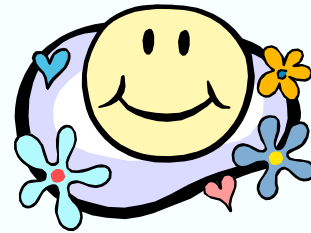
Probationers



What do Customers Want?

Customers want a variety of responses from you. Most of all, people want to be treated like human beings. Some of what they want include:

- To be taken seriously
- To be treated with respect
- To get immediate action
- To gain compensation/restitution
- To have the party who wronged them reprimanded or punished
- To clear up the problem so that it never happens again
- To be listened to



TIP: Customers are human! Deal with their human emotions first before you address the problem.

From the MJI Seminar "Top Quality Customer Service" presented by Murlene McKinnon, CEO, MACNLOW Associates. Reprinted with permission "Calming Upset Customers" by Rebecca L. Morgan, Crisp Publications, Inc. 1200 Hamilton Court, Menlo Park CA 94025.



Words that Make a Difference

The words you use in your interactions with people can either foster communication or undermine it. Here are some communication tips:

- ❖ **Keep it impersonal to avoid causing defensiveness**

If a person does something wrong, point out the mistake indirectly.

EXAMPLE: “There are a few areas on this form that we need to complete before it can be submitted.”

- ❖ **Use “I” instead of “you”**

Don’t blame or belittle the individual you are working with. Acknowledge the problem using an “I” statement.

EXAMPLE: “I can see there’s been a misunderstanding.”

- ❖ **Avoid giving orders**

People don’t like to feel like they are taking orders. Rephrase your statement as a question.

EXAMPLE: “Would you mind waiting while I speak with my supervisor?”

- ❖ **Take ownership in solving the problem**

Even if it isn’t your job duty, always try to locate someone who can help.

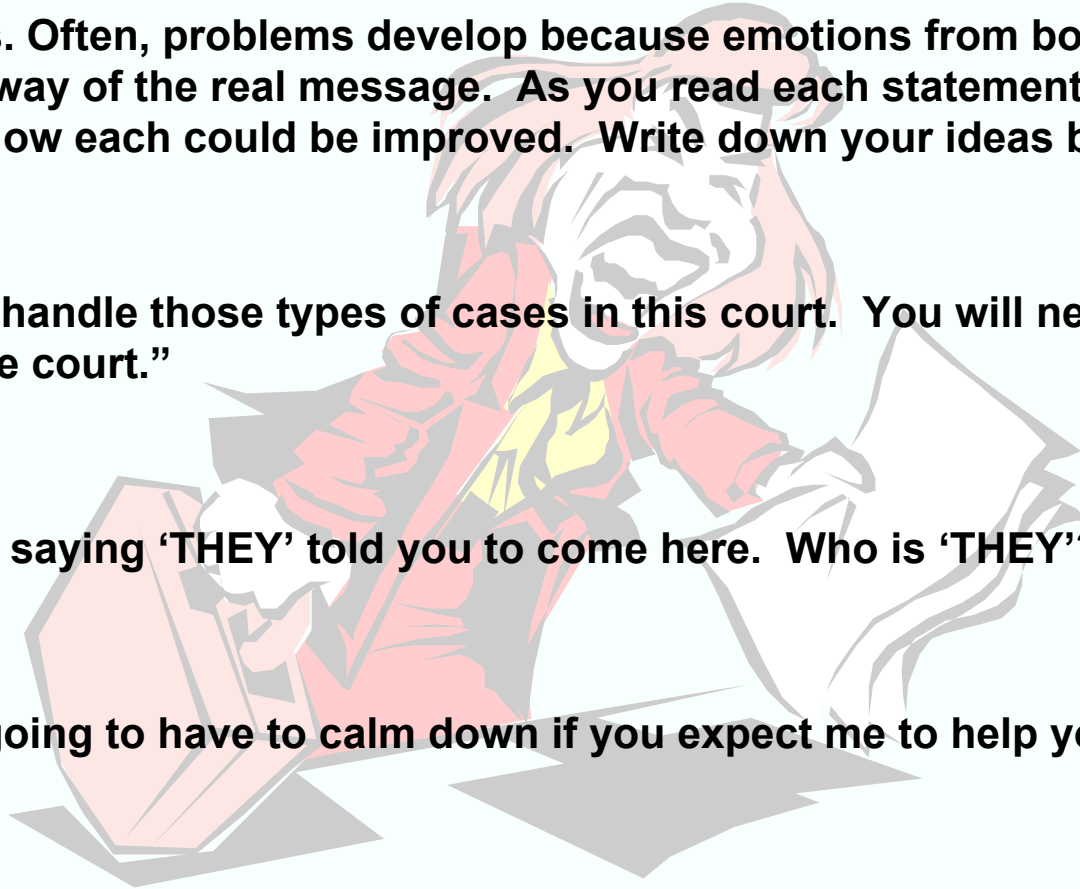
EXAMPLE: “I don’t have that authority, but let me find someone who might be able to help.”



Communication Skills Assessment

We know how we *should* communicate with our internal and external customers. Often, problems develop because emotions from both parties get in the way of the real message. As you read each statement below, consider how each could be improved. Write down your ideas below each statement.

1. “We don’t handle those types of cases in this court. You will need to go to the probate court.”
2. “You keep saying ‘THEY’ told you to come here. Who is ‘THEY’?”
3. “You are going to have to calm down if you expect me to help you.”
4. “It really isn’t my job to help you figure out which of your options would work best for you.”



Communication Skills Assessment

Here are some alternative ways to phrase each statement....

- 1. “It sounds like your case would be handled in the probate court. Let me give you directions so that you can find it...”**
- 2. “May I ask specifically who advised you to come to the courthouse?”**
- 3. “What you are dealing with can be frustrating. In order for me to help you, let me clarify your exact needs.....”**
- 4. “I’m happy to explain your options in more detail, but I cannot decide which option would be best for you.”**



Effective Listening Skills




There are times when we simply hear people talking without really **LISTENING**. Listening carefully is a skill that requires conscious practice to develop.

To assess your current listening habits, complete the checklist on the next page.....



Listening Habits Checklist

Place a  in front of the items below that you are doing consistently.

Place a  next to the items you want to improve upon. Be honest with yourself – no one else will see this but you!

- ☐ Focus on what the speaker is saying – not how he/she is saying it (accent, dialect, grammatical errors, etc.)
- ☐ Listen carefully for emotions as well as facts.
- ☐ Take a few brief notes of important details such as dates, times, amounts, etc.
- ☐ Focus on the person talking, not on distractions of the workplace.
- ☐ Avoid letting upset customers push your buttons, causing you to respond emotionally.
- ☐ Do not interrupt or finish someone's sentences.
- ☐ Avoid being distracted by how a person looks – clothes they wear, hairstyle, makeup.
- ☐ Make eye contact.
- ☐ Paraphrase what you heard the customer say to ensure understanding.



Listening Checklist Results

You may find that you have more **!**'s than **☑**'s, and that's okay. It just means that you have an opportunity to develop your listening skills. Here are some tips that can help you become a better listener:

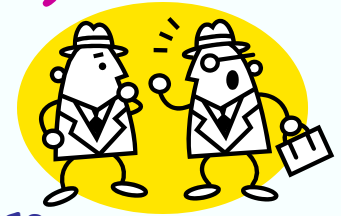
- **Concentrate on understanding** – Be aware of your own filters. Don't let your perceptions and beliefs get in the way of understanding. Do not interrupt. If you have the urge to interrupt, take a deep breath and remind yourself to listen.
- **Listen for both facts and feelings** – When emotions run high, facts and feelings become intertwined. You'll need to understand both before resolving the underlying issues.
- **Pay attention to nonverbal cues** – The effective listener perceives far more than the speaker's words. A person's posture, body movements, and facial expressions can speak volumes about his or her feelings and energy level. These nonverbal cues can convey not only a person's emotional state, but also how the person is coping with the emotions.

*Tips from "Handling Emotions Under Pressure", © 2000 Achieve Global, Inc.





Tips for Dealing with Difficult Customers (Internal & External)



Time Out:

- ❖ If you find yourself becoming upset, wanting to cry, or yell at a customer, give yourself a "time out". Excuse yourself politely: "Excuse me for a moment while I check our guidelines on this matter." Get some air and take a few deep breaths. You may even want to request that your supervisor finish up with the customer.

Polite Repetition:

- ❖ If the customer keeps insisting on something that's unreasonable or impossible, keep repeating what you CAN do without becoming hostile or loud.

Take Notes:

- ❖ Taking notes keeps you focused on the facts instead of getting caught up in the emotion. It also lets the customer know that you are listening and they often respond by calming down.



"The more I understand myself,
the more effectively I can
work with others." - Zig Zigler



Understanding your own natural communication style is the first step in being able to communicate effectively with others. Review the following 4 styles and determine which one you identify with most:

D Communication Style

Makes things happen – a risk taker
Is action oriented - a decision maker
Is a problem solver
Person of few words – to the point
Voice tone is confident
Work area is fairly neat with 2 or 3 piles all pertaining to ongoing work
Has awards prominently displayed
Body gestures are few, but are sharp and assertive when used

E Communication Style

Is optimistic and enthusiastic
Knows a lot of people
Talks a lot – very descriptive
Uses the word “we” when giving directions/instructions
Excited voice tone – uses exaggerated adjectives such as “That’s Amazing”
Often involved in many projects at once
Work area is anything but neat – visually diverse wall decorations
Body gestures are wide and expansive



S Communication Style

Is loyal

A team player

Patience is a strong characteristic

Avoids conflict

Tends to always say “yes”

Voice tone is sincere and calm

Is complimentary but low key

Body gestures tend to be gentle movements

Work area isn't always neat

Surrounds self with photos of friends/family and motivational phrases.

P Communication Style

Detail oriented

Very well organized

Strives for excellence

Can be overly critical of self and others

Can sometimes struggle with adapting to changes

Voice tone is serious and precise

Phrasing is long and detailed

Gestures are controlled and specific – typically small in comparison to other styles

Work area is neat and carefully filed. Few accessories adorn the workspace.



Communication Styles

- **D Communication Style is**
 - Dominant, Driver, Doer
- **E Communication Style is**
 - Energized, Enthusiastic, creates Effect
- **S Communication Style is**
 - Steady, Stable, Sound
- **P Communication Style is**
 - Perfectionist, Precise, Pursuit of excellence

* Some information from “Expanding Your Horizons” © 1985 Nancy Allen



Communication Styles

Everyone has a different preference in the way they are comfortable communicating. One style is not better than another. In fact, most people find that even though they tend to prefer one communication style, they find opportunities to utilize all four styles to some degree. Realistically, we can't expect people to change their natural communication style to match ours. To provide quality customer service, there will be more occasions that we need to adapt the way we communicate with people to make the interaction more productive.

You have TWO choices –

Only use your natural communication style and endure some conflict

-OR-

Learn how to bridge the communication gap by adapting your style when necessary.



A B C D E F G H I J K L M N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z
1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25 26

Attitude is Everything!

A = 1

T = 20

T = 20

I = 9

T = 20

U = 21

D = 4

E = 5

100%

Your attitude determines 100% of
the impression you leave with
people every day.

The Good News:

**You Get To Choose Your
Attitude!!!**





The Impact of Attitude on Customer Service



Your attitude works like a mental filter affecting the way you experience the world and what happens to you. If you have a filter of optimism, you tend to focus on the positive aspects of life. You think about the “can do’s” instead of the “can’t do’s”. Looking at life through “rose colored glasses” affects your interactions with others in several key ways:

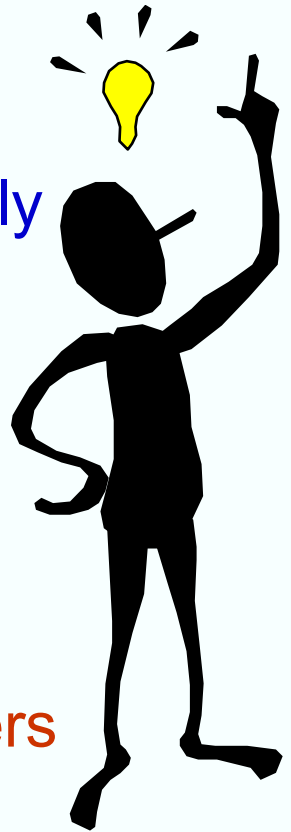
- ❖ **Resiliency** – When faced with obstacles such as changes in the workplace or difficult customers, you are able to go with the flow.
- ❖ **Enthusiasm and Energy** – A positive attitude generates enthusiasm about what you do. Others enjoy being around a person with an optimistic outlook. Customers tend to respond positively to your upbeat energy.
- ❖ **Approachability** – Initiating a smile to your customers typically prompts a smile back. A smile can put people at ease and calm their concerns.



What I Learned....

As a review, answer the following questions and share your insights with your supervisor:

1. Do I treat internal customers of the court differently from external customers? How or Why?
2. Why is customer service important to my court?
3. How does my natural communication style affect my interactions with others?
4. What attitude do I choose daily?
5. What will I change about the way I work with others based on what I learned in this self-study?



Resources